



**Representative Larry Haler**

# 2005 Legislative Update

## 8th District

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Dear Friends,

It's hard to believe the 2005 legislative session is already halfway over. I appreciate the opportunity to serve as your new representative in Olympia.

This session, my colleagues and I have been busy working on many important issues, including:

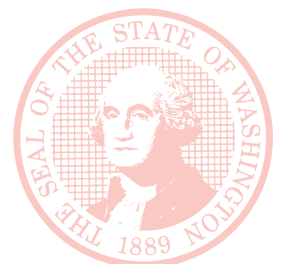
- Adopting a balanced budget without tax increases
- Streamlining government to encourage job growth and economic development
- Improving health care so it's affordable and accessible for everyone
- Reforming our state's election system
- Enhancing our educational systems

You'll read about many of these issues inside this newsletter.

I invite you to contact me any time with your ideas, questions or concerns. And if you have an opportunity to visit Olympia, please feel free to stop by my office.

Sincerely,

Larry Haler  
State Representative





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### Local Legislation

I sponsored several bills this session that aim to positively impact the businesses and residents of our district. Here are two that were approved by the House of Representatives and are headed to the Senate for consideration:

**House Bill 1384** would authorize joint operating agencies to use a competitive negotiation process for siting, construction, and operation of renewable energy projects, including those fueled by wind, solar energy, geothermal energy or biomass energy.

I sponsored this bill because it would enable Energy Northwest, the only joint operating agency in the state, to build resources for public power at the least cost, with the hope of passing along the savings to ratepayers. Energy Northwest operates and maintains the state's only nuclear powered electrical generation facility.

**House Bill 1398**, also recently approved by the House, would include goats in livestock theft statutes.

This proposal came about because of a recent goat theft in the Prosser area. This type of thing may not happen very often, but when it does happen, it hurts. Depending on the variety of goat, some are worth thousands of dollars. Under this bill, fines up to \$20,000 and jail time could be imposed. Goat owners would also be able to pursue private action against the thief for damages.

### House says YES to early learning



Early learning programs could soon become a priority in our state. Under **House Bill 1152**, the Washington Early Learning Council would be established in the Office of the Governor.

Building upon the outstanding work that's being done in communities around the state, including the Kennewick School District, the Council would provide leadership and vision for the continued development and expansion of early learning programs and services for children birth to five. Included would be regulation of child care and preschool programs, child care subsidy programs, and professional development and training for early learning professionals.

The Kennewick School District offers a wonderful example of what early learning programs can do and what happens when the community works together.

With reading scores steadily increasing every year, the Kennewick School District's reading program has proven that when children are nurtured and given early learning opportunities, they will achieve great success.

House Bill 1152 was approved by the House and has moved on to the Senate for consideration.

### Simple majority resolution approved by House

The House has also passed a measure this session that would allow voters to decide this November whether or not to change the state's Constitution to allow school levies to pass with only a simple majority. **House Joint Resolution**

**4205** has moved on to the Senate for consideration.

I strongly believe that a simple majority should be used to pass school levies. Simple majority gives communities local control, allowing each community to be more responsive to the needs of their schools.



### Controlling health care costs

The rising costs of health care are making it difficult for employers to provide coverage for their employees and for families to afford care. According to a recent poll, nearly 600,000 Washington residents are uninsured. Getting access to affordable health care shouldn't be the struggle that it is right now.

House Republicans have a health care reform package that includes structural changes to our health care system. We are proposing to get at the real cost-drivers that are making health coverage too expensive for families and employers.

- We want to expand the use of Health Savings Accounts, which are tax-free funds that help families stretch their health care dollars.
- We are proposing to remove some of the 47 mandates on insurance coverage to help employers provide affordable coverage for their employees instead of forcing everyone to pay for an expensive "Cadillac" health plan.
- It's important that we reduce liability premiums that are forcing health care providers to close their doors, move to other states or stop providing specialized services.
- And we want health care choices to remain between patients and their doctors – not a government bureaucracy.

House Republicans support a consumer-driven health care system that provides competition and choice. We believe it offers us the best hope to provide affordable health coverage for all and the quality care that every citizen deserves.





## Restoring trust in our election system

Thanks to all of you who contacted me to express your concerns about the governor's election. To ensure we don't ever have a repeat of that fiasco, House Republicans are committed to reforming election policies and processes. Our state constitution promises "free and equal" elections and the reforms we're proposing will help us meet that standard.

**To ensure integrity in the election process,** our legislation includes requiring counties to reconstruct their voter registration rolls by 2007. Photo ID would have to be shown at the polling place as well.

**To regain the public's confidence in election results,** our legislation includes requiring provisional, absentee, and polling place ballots to be distinguished by color and bar coding, to ensure they are counted correctly and not improperly mixed. To make sure that every vote has a voter, counties would have to reconcile the number of ballots counted with the number of voters credited with voting a lawful ballot – and fully explain any discrepancy.

**To ensure that every vote is treated fairly and equally,** our legislation would move the primary to August. County election offices would have more time to mail absentee ballots, and voters would have more time to return their ballots, particularly military voters. To protect votes cast by military voters, counties would be allowed to count military ballots that are cast before or on Election Day by military personnel and received after Election Day up until final certification.



## Canadian prescription drug bills are bad medicine

Recently the House voted on legislation to curb prescription drug costs by authorizing bulk purchasing from Canada. Not only are these proposals in violation of federal law, they are flawed policies that put consumers at risk and fail to deliver savings.

## Living within our means

One of our most important duties this session is to pass a balanced budget that covers state operations for 2005-07. While we're making budget decisions, our first priority is to protect you, the taxpayer. You've probably heard that our state is facing a budget deficit, with some predicting that we'll be nearly \$2.2 billion short of what's needed to keep the state running at current levels. However, it's important to keep in mind that the state has nearly \$2 billion more to spend this year than in the last two-year budget cycle. Making ends meet is simply a matter of spending priorities and living within our means. We are committed to balancing the state budget with no new taxes.

House Republicans have proposed legislation that would restore fiscal integrity to our state's budgeting and spending process. One proposal would create a Required Reserve Fund – also called a "rainy day" fund – within the state constitution. This would guarantee citizens that a reserve is set aside to protect them from needless tax increases and cuts to core services during economic downturns.

We also believe that it's time to require the Legislature and governor to create a budget that fits the spending limit, rather than the other way around. Our proposal would restore the state's statutory spending limit and close loopholes that have allowed lawmakers to ignore spending limits.



Both the FDA and the Canadian government have clearly said they won't be responsible for the safety and quality of drugs brought from Canada into the U.S. We can't vouch for these drugs and we shouldn't be sending citizens off to buy them.

If you and your family need prescription drug assistance now, here are two programs that are available to help:

**Rx Help for Washington** helps citizens gain access to discount drug programs.

Toll Free 1-877-923-6779

[www.rxhelpforwa.org](http://www.rxhelpforwa.org)

**Together Rx Access** offers prescription drug coverage for qualified individuals.

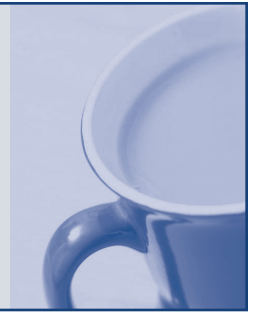
Toll Free 1-800-444-4106

[www.TogetherRxAccess.com](http://www.TogetherRxAccess.com)

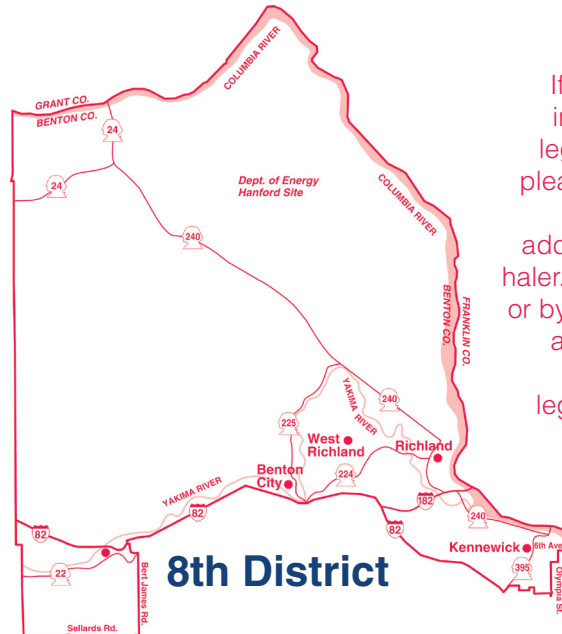


## Thank you!

As you may know, I've had a series of coffees around our district and I'd like to thank you for making them such a great success! I met many of you at January's coffee in Richland and February's coffee in Kennewick. The third and final coffee of the 2005 legislative session is coming up at the end of this month. **On Saturday, March 26 from 2-4 p.m., I'll be at the Sixth Avenue Coffee Shop in Prosser.** I'm hoping you can join us. It's a great opportunity for me to meet with you face-to-face and to hear about what matters most to you.

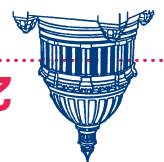


I'm privileged to sponsor students from the 8th District as legislative pages. This is Erin Story, a 10th-grader from Kamiakin High School. She paged for a week earlier this session and did a great job. Thanks Erin!



If you're interested in receiving e-mail legislative updates, please send me your name and e-mail address via e-mail at [haler.larry@leg.wa.gov](mailto:haler.larry@leg.wa.gov) or by calling my office at (360) 786-7986, or the toll-free legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000.

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